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USDA Closes Washington BSE Investigation

OLYMPIA – Feb. 9, 2004 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced today that it was officially closing its investigation into the BSE incident in Washington state.

Based on scientific guidelines established by the World Organization for Animal Health and last week's report by the USDA secretary's special international review team, investigators believe it is time to conclude the investigation.

"I would like to thank the USDA and the Food and Drug Administration for their rapid and thorough response to this isolated BSE incident," Gov. Gary Locke said. "It is important to point out that of the 255 suspect cows tested in our state, only one – the original case – tested positive for BSE, or mad cow disease.

"Tests of all other suspect animals were negative. This should give a strong vote of confidence to our cattle producers and to consumers that our beef supply is safe. Our efforts now should focus on working to reopen all markets to U.S. and Washington beef products," Locke said.

"I would like to thank our state Agriculture, Health and Ecology departments for their hard work and commitment to aiding USDA in this investigation. The investigation could not have been completed as quickly without the assistance of the dairy farmers, local governments and the Washington Dairy Commission. Finally, I must thank the affected communities for their patience and vigilance throughout the investigation."

Valoria Loveland, director of the state Department of Agriculture, said, "I would like to thank the USDA for the timely and responsive way it handled this investigation. The investigation has been painstaking and thorough. It has resulted in only one positive case of BSE. This gives strong support to the food-safety protections that were already in place when this case was identified.

"This incident has led to even more stringent safeguards, including the immediate banning of all downer cows from the human food supply and holding meat from cattle that have been tested for BSE until negative test results are received," Loveland said.

“I do not believe this investigation could have been wrapped up in less than two months without the help and cooperation of a lot of people, not the least of which were the dairy farmers themselves, whose livelihoods hung in the balance. Our state’s consumers should have every reason to continue to believe that their beef is safe.”

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